

love you like that

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love you like that

by [Pale_Blue](#)

Summary

Warm hands suddenly encased his, pulling them away from his shirt collar and back down onto the table. Shane risked a glance at Ilya and saw only concern and confusion on his face, but he couldn't keep looking at him directly, couldn't look him in the eye.

Couldn't let Ilya see him lose it like this, in public, all because the shirt felt wrong. Because it felt too much like being five and ripping hand-knitted jumpers from his body because they hurt. Like needing seams in his socks to sit a certain way. Like a childhood spent tearfully pulling clothes off his body until his parents figured out what fabrics he could tolerate. It felt like being seven and unable to explain to teachers why the other children didn't like him, why he hid under the tables when the classroom was too noisy.

Notes

Title from Love You Like That by Dagny

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Shane fiddled anxiously with his sleeve under the table and tried to ignore the fact the shirt felt like sandpaper against his skin. Ilya had gotten it for him. As a gift. There was no way he could have known.

It was too stiff, too new. The seams felt like they were shaving a layer of skin off every time they touched him. The collar was too high, choking, constricting.

It hurt.

He pulled at it for what felt like the hundredth time and tried to ignore the fact he could feel each and every point where the shirt was touching his body.

Shane looked across at Ilya. He was studying the menu of the café they'd chosen for breakfast with a divot of concentration between his brows. Because that was a thing they could do now that they were officially friends in the eyes of the media. Friends who ran a charity together, friends who could be seen off the ice together.

Friends who could breakfast together in public now that they had an excuse handy in their back pockets.

Shane pushed the collar away from his throat again. It felt like the blades of a pair of scissors.

Under the table, Ilya nudged him gently with his foot.

"Everything okay?" he asked, lowering the menu so that he could look at Shane properly.

"Yeah, just a lot of choices," he said quickly, trying to position himself in a way that the shirt didn't feel so bad. The chair squeaked in complaint as he shuffled his weight back and forth. He hadn't even managed to read a single word on the menu, too focussed on trying to ignore the way the fabric felt.

"It's too much?" Ilya asked, brow furrowing with concern.

He had dressed up a little as well, in a dark blue shirt that made his eyes leap out of his face. His hair was carefully styled rather than just in messy curls around his face. As they had left his apartment that morning, Shane had gleefully told Ilya just how much he looked forward to messing up his hair later. Ilya had told him to fuck off with a grin that told Shane exactly what he really thought of the idea.

After breakfast they were meeting with a new sponsor for the Irina Foundation. Shane wanted to make a good first impression, to convey that this was something they were serious about. It was why he'd picked out the shirt Ilya had gotten him in the first place. Their fashion choices didn't always overlap but it was hard to deny that Ilya could clean up when he wanted to.

Shane trusted his choices.

"I'm fine," Shane said. Shuffled in his seat again.

And then suddenly there was a waitress standing at their table, iPad in hand, staring at him expectantly. Shane stared back at her blankly for a second. He could feel a bead of sweat dripping down the small of his back, making the fabric feel even worse, and he wanted to rip his skin off from the feeling.

“Sorry, lost in thought,” he said, through the *wrong* feeling clogging up his throat.

He quickly looked down at the menu but it was all blurring together. Letters swimming and dancing before his eyes until it barely resembled English anymore. He’d missed Ilya ordering so he couldn’t even just copy him. Cloying panic sprung up in his chest, made his hands tremble where he was clutching at the menu like a lifeline. Made his face feel hot.

Ilya gently took the menu from his hands.

“He will have the wholegrain avocado toast, with tomatoes on the side and no eggs,” Ilya said quickly. “And a still water.”

He handed the menus back with a bright smile that he kept plastered on until the waitress had left hearing vicinity again.

“Shane?”

Shane tried to take a deep breath, tried to protest that he could have ordered for himself because he wasn’t a fucking child, but all that came out was a choking sound. He pulled at his cuffs again, more aggressively this time. Wondered if he could just rip the shirt off at the table.

“Shane, do you want to go?” Ilya asked, voice held carefully even and steady.

He was leaning over the table, peering worriedly at him. Shane turned to the side, trying to hide. He didn’t want Ilya to see the tears that he was desperately trying to blink back. Didn’t want him to see the flush of embarrassment burning scarlet across his cheeks.

He stared out of the window at the sunny street outside, trying desperately to distract himself by taking in minute details. The cyclist unlocking their bike across the street, the way the sunlight reflected off the window of the store opposite. The clumsy graffiti sprayed across the bus stop.

It didn’t help.

The collar was choking him and Shane gave up, yanked open the top button with clumsy fingers. It wasn’t enough.

Warm hands suddenly encased his, pulling them away from his shirt collar and back down onto the table. He risked a glance at Ilya and saw only concern and confusion on his face, but Shane couldn’t keep looking at him directly, couldn’t look him in the eye.

Couldn’t let Ilya see him lose it like this, in public, all because the shirt felt wrong. Because it felt too much like being five and ripping hand-knitted jumpers from his body because they hurt. Like needing seams in his socks to sit a certain way. Like a childhood spent tearfully

pulling clothes off his body until his parents figured out what fabrics he could tolerate. It felt like being seven and unable to explain to teachers why the other children didn't like him, why he hid under the tables when the classroom was too noisy.

"Shane, is it the café? It is too loud?" Ilya asked.

Shane shook because it wasn't. It was too early for it to be, tables far enough apart that conversations didn't collide mid-air. He wasn't surprised Ilya had remembered that detail, because Ilya had a memory like an elephant for things that were uncomfortable for Shane.

Ilya suddenly got up and pulled Shane to his feet.

"Where..."

Shane trailed off uselessly as Ilya subtly guided him towards the bathroom, a firm hand at the base of his spine. He pulled at the cuffs again because standing up had somehow made them feel worse, made them feel like they were cutting in all the way down to his bones. The café swam around him as stubborn tears sprung up again.

The bathroom was small, no windows. The sort of claustrophobic space that Shane usually didn't voluntarily spend more time in that necessary. It smelled overwhelmingly of citrus cleaning products and wet paper towels.

Ilya softly closed the door behind them and turned back to Shane.

"What is bothering you?" he asked, steady and calm. "Is okay, you can tell me."

Shane swallowed hard. Tried to get the words out past the choking grip of the shirt, past the ball of shame in his throat.

"The shirt," he said, barely above a whisper. His tongue wasn't coordinating, wasn't moving fast enough. The words sounded tinny and strange in his own ears.

Ilya frowned, eyes roaming over the shirt.

"But is cotton, you said cotton is fine. I made sure is only cotton and nothing else."

"Too stiff," Shane explained unsteadily, pulling at his collar again, harder this time. "The collar. The seams feel bad."

"Okay," Ilya said soothingly. "Okay."

He studied Shane for a few seconds, chewing on his lip as he thought.

"What about my shirt?" he asked, holding out an arm.

Shane stared at the proffered limb, then back at Ilya's face in confusion.

"What?"

“The texture. Is better?” Ilya took Shane’s hand and gently guided it to his sleeve.

Shane ran his fingers over it carefully, the comforting heat of Ilya’s skin burning through from underneath the fabric. It was better. Softer, more worn in. The collar was floppier, less structured. The overall fit was a little oversized, nothing that would cling or constrict.

He nodded.

Ilya immediately started unbuttoning his shirt.

That was enough to rip Shane temporarily out of his anxiety spiral, from the awfulness of the cuffs that felt like they were rubbing his wrists raw. From the fact it felt like his world was ending in a damp bathroom in downtown Montreal.

“Here?”

He couldn’t believe what was happening. Couldn’t believe that that was apparently where Ilya’s head had gone.

Ilya looked up and Shane’s disbelief must have been painfully obvious.

“Shane, get your head out of gutter,” he scolded, still undoing his buttons. “If my shirt is better, then we swap shirts. Yes?”

Oh.

Shane froze, watching Ilya shrug out of his shirt and tuck it under his arm. It was such an *Ilya* solution, to not question in the moment and just straight head to a solution. To not make it a big deal when so many people in the past had made him feel like a freak when his little quirks came up.

“Do you need help?” Ilya asked softly, gesturing vaguely to Shane’s torso.

There wasn’t any judgement in his voice.

Shane quickly shook his head and clumsily undid his own buttons, breathing a sigh of relief when the offensive fabric was finally away from his skin.

Ilya held out his shirt and Shane slipped it on. It was better, undeniably so. The seams were flatter, more worn, softer against his skin. The collar wasn’t choking him. It was a little big, the shoulders sagging awkwardly and he would need to tuck it in to avoid looking stupid, but it was still significantly better.

Shane’s shirt was a little short in the sleeves on Ilya, barely reaching his wrists, but Ilya just undid the cuffs and rolled them up. His forearms were still tanned from lazy summer days at the cottage and they looked good against the white of the shirt.

It worked on him, miraculously.

“Sorry,” Shane whispered hoarsely, watching Ilya study his reflection and adjust the shirt until it didn’t look like he was wearing someone else’s clothing.

“For what?”

“It was a gift, and you did everything right, it just-“

“No, no, Shane, no apologising. I am not upset. No one needs to be upset now. Everything is fine.”

He adjusted his collar one last time, gave his reflection one last once over, then turned back to Shane.

“Blue looks good on you,” he said softly, running his eyes over Shane’s torso. “Touch is okay?”

Shane nodded, tentatively.

Ilya kissed him gently, chastely, and Shane couldn’t help but notice he was keeping his upper body away from Shane. Like he was doing his best to ensure Shane didn’t have to come in contact with the shirt again.

He tasted like spearmint toothpaste. Familiar. Safe.

“Do you want to go back and eat at the table, or eat in car?” Ilya asked, smoothing the skin under Shane’s eyes as he did so with gentle thumbs. Like he could soothe the tears still lingering there back into his tear ducts.

“We can eat here,” Shane said. “Sorry, for being so picky, so-“

“No apologising,” Ilya cut him off with a shake of his head. “We no longer have problem. Is solved. So now we eat breakfast and then we go to the meeting. Then, when we are home, you explain to me what was not good about this shirt, and I will remember for next time.”

Shane went to say something else, maybe apologise again, but Ilya gave him a warning look so he just nodded. Tried to swallow his shame down.

Back at the table, the food had arrived and Shane sipped slowly on the water. Tried to gather himself back together, because they would need to be professional with the new sponsors. Smile and shake hands and make sure to look like they were competent.

Ilya had ordered an impressive stack of waffles with chocolate, along with a large syrup-coated coffee and a side of strawberries. He didn’t look upset that he’d had to change shirts. In fact, he looked more interested in the food than anything else, quickly tucking in while Shane was still worrying at the condensation on his glass of water.

“Stop worrying,” Ilya said suddenly, through a mouthful of waffle. “Everything is fine, Shane.”

“You’re not upset?” Shane asked. “You don’t think I’m...”

Shane was too scared to say it, here over what was supposed to be a furtive date that they could pass off as a just-friends-thing if anyone recognised them. After how unbothered Ilya had been.

A freak. Sensitive. Making a big deal out of nothing. Childish. He'd heard them all over the years.

"I think you look good," Ilya said, gesturing with his chocolate-coated knife.

Then he put down his cutlery and looked at Shane seriously.

"Shane, I love you enough to move countries for you. I will not leave you because of a shirt."

"You don't think I'm being, you know..."

He gestured vaguely.

Words weren't coming. Because Shane was scared that once he said them, Ilya might agree and say them back. That he might somehow manifest disappointment in one of the few people who'd never treated him as less-than when his neuroticism made an appearance in contexts he couldn't compensate in with hockey.

"No," Ilya said. "Shane, if it makes you overwhelmed, then I take it seriously. The same way you take it seriously if I am having a bad day. I support you, you support me, yes?"

"Yeah," Shane nodded, reaching across the table and giving Ilya's hand a quick squeeze.

It wasn't over, not for him. Shane knew he'd be thinking about it the rest of the day, worrying at it like a wobbly tooth until he could taste copper in his mouth. But he didn't doubt that Ilya was genuine. Not for a second.

Because Ilya hadn't batted an eye at Shane preferring his foods separated on his plate after a long day. Hadn't minded when Shane needed evenings without talking sometimes. Never teased him in a mean-spirited way when he didn't pick up on a joke straight away. He had watched Shane fold his clothes up neatly before sex and still found him desirable.

"I love you," he whispered across their breakfasts. "So much."

Quiet enough that it stayed just for them.

Ilya nudged his foot under the table again. Lined their feet up so that they were side by side, and it was stupid but it made Shane feel better. More grounded.

"Love you more."

"It's not a fucking competition," Shane protested, but Ilya only grinned at him lazily in return. There was a smear of chocolate at the corner of his mouth and had they been at home Shane would have removed it with his tongue.

It wasn't a big deal, Shane told himself like it was the only thing keeping him together. He prodded at the avocado toast Ilya had ordered for him, wondered about how badly it would fuck up his careful diet.

It wasn't a big deal.

Everything would be fine.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

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